Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-19-85
Week of May 7, 2007

CANOLA WATCH PROVIDES TIMELY INFORMATION TO GROWERS

The latest Crop Report from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food estimates that acreage seeded to canola in the province will increase by six per cent this year over 2006.

With canola production expected to rise, a tool that can provide weekly updates and timely information on crop issues could be a big help to producers, researchers and other stakeholders associated with the industry.

The Canola Agronomy Network is once again distributing its "Canola Watch" reports for the 2007 growing season. Reports will begin in early May.

The electronic updates are e-mailed at no charge to anyone interested in tracking the progress of the prairie canola crop. Recipients simply need to sign up for the service.

David Vanthuyne, the Canola Council of Canada's agronomist for eastern Saskatchewan, says the service has been very popular since its inception. "Our weekly reports over the past four seasons have been extremely successful in relaying key agronomic issues to all segments of the canola industry," he stated.

The Canola Watch reports provide details of what is happening out in the field, and also relay information to identify and deal with issues as they arise, such as the bertha army worm infestations that occurred during July and August in 2006.

"It's related to everything from insect outbreaks to problems occurring with stand establishment – anything related to canola agronomics will get brought forward. Then we, in turn, either offer solutions or identify sources where growers can go for more information," Vanthuyne explained.

Vanthuyne says this proactive approach will continue to help many growers and industry agronomists stay on top of canola crop management. "The whole idea behind Canola Watch was to gather information from a wide range of sources related to canola agronomics, and bring it to growers as quickly as we possibly could."

(more)

The Canola Agronomy Network includes more than 20 agronomists and prairie extension specialists, plus growers and industry retailers, who take part in weekly conference calls from late April to early September. Based on those discussions, they prepare the weekly Canola Watch updates.

The reports are then e-mailed to a growing list of over 1,000 industry professionals and producers each week.

"Our number one focus is to provide canola growers and the people who advise them with in-season, just-in-time information," said John Mayko, chair of the Network and Senior Agronomist for the Canola Council of Canada.

"We are very pleased with the continued response and enthusiasm of the people who have come on board."

Producers and other canola industry stakeholders wishing to add their names to the Canola Watch distribution list can sign up on the Canola Council's website at www.canola-council.org, send an e-mail to admin@canola-council.org, or call the agency's head office at (204) 982-2100.

The weekly reports are also available online at www.canola-council.org/growing_watchreports.html.

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ORGANIC EXPORTERS GET A BOOST

Saskatchewan's organic sector is getting a boost with the expansion of a successful financing program for exporters.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) is providing $1 million in targeted support for companies exporting organic or natural branded agricultural products through the nextrade™ program.

The nextrade™ finance initiative is administered by STEP – the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership. The program provides customized financing solutions for small and medium-sized exporters in the province. Basically, it gives companies the ability to grow larger by providing flexible financing to cover the costs of doing business abroad, such as the input costs required to fill a large order.

The program has been a huge success since its inception two years ago, generating an estimated $18 million impact on the Saskatchewan economy.

The new investment from SAF will enable nextrade™ to focus on one of its biggest clients.

"The funding will allow STEP to further meet the demands of our rapidly growing organic sector, which has become a dominant area of past nextrade™ finance lending," said STEP CEO Dale Botting.

"By creating this separate fund balance dedicated to the sale of organics and natural products, the injection will also create more room in the balance of the nextrade™ finance fund to serve the increased demand from all other sectors."

Agricultural commodities and agri-value sectors account for over half of the value of all transactions under the initiative. The organic sector accounts for 90 per cent of the program's transactions in the agricultural commodity sector.

Saskatchewan is Canada's leading exporter of organic products. The province has the largest acreage of certified organic farmland in Canada (more than 700,000 acres), as well as the largest number of certified organic producers (more than 1,200).

(more)

SAF Minister Mark Wartman says the funding will meet an important market demand.

"We wanted to ensure that STEP has the resources it needs to continue to meet the demands of our growing organic sector, both now and into the future," said Wartman.

Botting used the announcement as an opportunity to applaud the government's response to that need.

"This announcement is a testament to our excellent public-private partnership between STEP and the Saskatchewan Government," Botting said.

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WORKSHOP HELPS THOSE WITH A FLAIR FOR INNOVATING AND INVENTING

Biotechnology is a field on the cutting edge, with research and development continually leading to new products, new innovations and new applications.

Because of the many discoveries that originate in the biotech industry, the management and protection of intellectual property, or IP, is an important consideration. Otherwise, months and years of hard work could be scooped up and taken to market by someone who had little or nothing to do with the actual find.

This challenge that constantly faces innovators is the reason Ag-West Bio Inc. organized the Intellectual Property Management Workshop, taking place May 14 in Saskatoon.

"The intent of the workshop is to provide practical strategies for knowledge-based companies in protecting and extracting value from their intellectual property, be it patents, trademarks, trade secrets, market knowledge or internal processes," said Jazmin Bolanos, Project Co-ordinator with Ag-West Bio.

Bolanos says the workshop is relevant to a wide range of stakeholders, from financial professionals such as senior executives and venture capital managers, to entrepreneurs and business people actively involved in the commercialization of new technology, to the researchers and inventors responsible for the discoveries.

With considerable innovation currently taking place in the agricultural industry, Bolanos suggested the seminar may be of particular interest to this sector. "The workshop will provide practical intellectual property strategies for value-added agriculture businesses, with specific examples from actual Saskatchewan agri-businesses," she stated.

Some of the brightest innovations in agriculture come right from the hands that work the soil. As a result, even the average producer with a penchant for inventing new devices to make life easier on the farm or the field might find a lot of benefit from attending the session.

The workshop will be conducted by Dan Polonenko, a Patent Agent with Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP, considered to be one of Canada's leading law firms in this area.

(more)

Polonenko has 20 years of experience in the Canadian biotech industry, including more than seven at the corporate executive level. In addition to authoring a wide array of scientific papers and co-inventing four issued patent families, he has provided extensive intellectual property expertise and knowledge to a variety of organizations.

Among the important questions that will be examined in the workshop are: What is the role, value and usefulness of IP? How does it give an organization a competitive advantage? How should IP be licensed?

Registration for the Intellectual Property Management Workshop is $70 for Ag-West Bio members and $75 for non-members. Registration forms and additional information on the full-day session can be obtained online at www.agwest.sk.ca, or by calling (306) 975-1939.

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MIDGE-RESISTANT WHEAT VARIETIES BEGIN THE TREK TO MARKET

It's taken 15 years so far – and the wait isn't over – but four wheat varieties with resistance to wheat midge have now been recommended for registration.

Developed by wheat breeders from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Swift Current and Winnipeg, three of the varieties are in the Canadian Western Red Spring wheat class, and one is in the Canada Western Extra Strong wheat class.

The research was supported by the Western Grains Research Foundation in Saskatoon. Lanette Kuchenski, Executive Director of the Foundation, says it will be a while before the new varieties become available.

"What happens now is the line is licensed to a seed distributor," said Kuckenski. "They will begin increasing the seed, and it will take two to four years to increase it to the point where it can be made available for general use."

The midge-resistant trait was found in older American soft red winter wheat varieties. It has taken this long to move the trait into spring wheat varieties that also have the superior yield and other traits sought by Western Canadian farmers.

The resistance is the result of the induction of two naturally occurring compounds in the wheat kernels, ferulic acid and p-cumaric acid. With these compounds present, wheat midge larvae are not able to develop when feeding on the immature kernels.

Kuchenski says that one of the challenges is to intentionally keep the new varieties from being 100 per cent midge resistant.

"What we're trying to do is ensure that this one gene is somewhat protected from the wheat midge gaining resistance to it," she said. "So we're actually going to have to work with the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) to ensure that we can put in between five to 10 per cent of non-resistant variety."

(more)

The objective of maintaining some non-midge resistant plants within the varieties is to extend useful life of the resistant gene.

"What that's going to do is allow the insect to survive in relatively small numbers and have a very minor impact on yields and grades," said Kuchenski. In this way, there will be less pressure on the wheat midge population to develop tolerance to the resistant wheat varieties.

By holding back reproduction of the midge that feed on resistant plants, the impact of the new varieties should last another 10 to 20 years before the midge develops its own adaptation and learns to prosper on the resistant wheat.

Kuchenski says it is important to protect this technological advance because of the substantial investment required to develop the resistant varieties.

"It's extremely costly to breed for this resistance, because of the length of time and the amount of resources you put in before you see any type of light at the end of the tunnel," she stated. "What we want to do is try to protect the gene a little bit longer than we have in the past, which will give us the time to look for other alternative resistant genes."

The Western Grains Research Foundation uses a wheat check-off to fund the research, as well as government support for the projects.

According to Kuchenski, the midge resistant varieties are important for producers, not only because they will mitigate losses, but also because management of wheat midge infestations can be difficult.

"The only defence that producers have is pesticide application, which is costly," she said. "It's also really difficult to know the best time to spray for midge, and the expert resources who can help tend to be in demand all at the same time of the growing season."

Wheat midge damage resulted in yield losses and downgrading of wheat crops, largely in the east central and northeastern parts of the province in 2006. If conditions are favourable in 2007, wheat midge are likely to be even more widespread, so producers will be waiting anxiously for these new seed varieties to become available in the future.

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STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH BLOAT IN CATTLE GRAZING ALFALFA

Grazing cattle on alfalfa has proven advantages. The crop grows well without the need for nitrogen fertilizer, keeping operating costs low. It also provides the kind of high-quality feed that reduces production costs per animal. Additionally, it has environmental benefits in terms of soil protection and lessening the generation of methane in a cow's digestion process.

Alfalfa is often combined with grass when it is incorporated into a pasture stand. However, a concern that can make producers think twice about including it in their forage mix is the risk of bloat.

But Lorne Klein, a Forage Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says there are some general guidelines that can help cattle farmers deal with that risk.

"One strategy to reduce the threat of bloat is to include non-bloating legumes in the seed mix, such as sainfoin or cicer milkvetch, along with the alfalfa and grass," he said.

Other seeding techniques that will mitigate bloat risk include using the bloat-reduced alfalfa variety (AC Grazeland), selecting grass species that re-grow quickly after grazing, using an alfalfa species that re-grows slowly after grazing, and seeding the mix together in the same seed row rather than separate rows.

"You can also manage bloat risk by monitoring the state of plant growth and moving the herd accordingly," Klein noted. "The greatest risk of bloat occurs during the alfalfa's rapid vegetative growth before flowering occurs."

Other risk factors to watch for include frost damage in spring and fall, and the presence of morning dew, both of which tend to increase the likelihood of bloat occurring. Klein says it is also important that livestock grazing alfalfa have a good water supply, as well as salt and mineral ration.

There are bloat control products available on the market that will similarly reduce its occurrence. They include Rumensin CRC, a controlled release capsule administered orally before turning the cattle onto pasture, and Bloat Guard, which is very effective when fed daily.

(more)

There are other products under development or in use outside of Canada, but they have yet to be approved for use here.

Klein notes that livestock selection may be an additional factor in decreasing bloat on an alfalfa/grass forage mix.

"Cattle's tendency to bloat is believed by some to be inherited," he said. "That suggests keeping replacements from known low-bloat cows. There is also some belief that livestock can learn how to graze alfalfa more slowly."

Klein stresses that every strategy has its limitations, and there is no absolute guarantee that producers grazing on alfalfa will not witness some bloat in their herds. However, these practices have shown results in reducing that risk.

More information on forage and grazing, including suggested approaches to prevent bloat in cattle, can be obtained on the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca or by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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